

# Litva-Vilna Guberniya Post Office Locations Compared: 1801-12, 1820, 1829

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The earliest map for which I have a high-definition image depicting the locations of post offices in historic Lithuania (Fig. 1) is dated 1820, and probably published 1821. Prior to that time, maps of the area often showed "Postal Roads" without identifying towns with post offices. This map, with

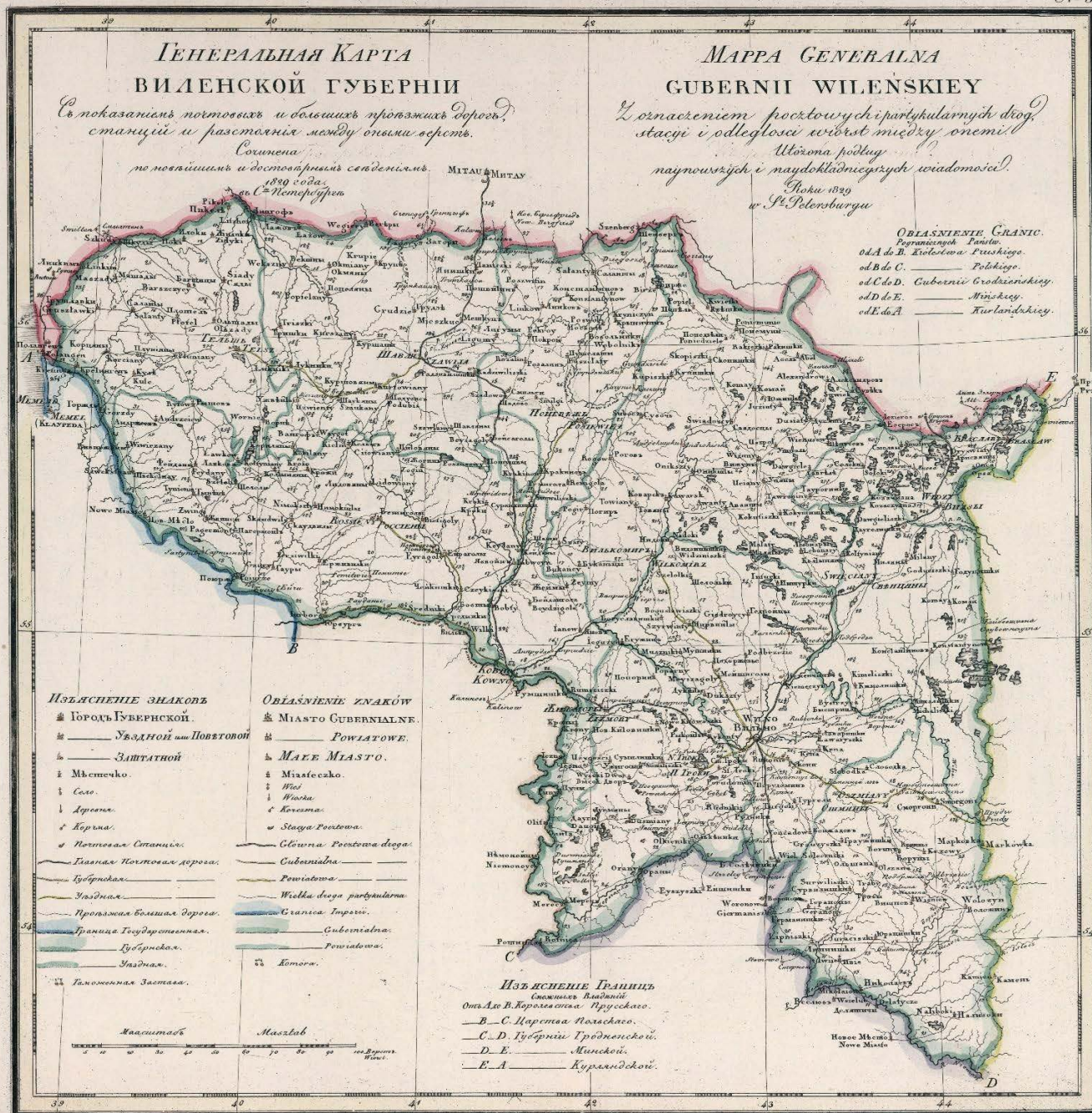
titles, legends, and town names in Russian and Polish, is titled "Виленской губернии /Gubernii Wilenskiej." (The official transliterated name of the entity was "Litva-Vilna guberniya," in existence 1801-40, when "Litva" was dropped from the name.) The map was created by military cartographer Col.



Fig. 1: 1820 Ryadyshev/ Пядышев (cartographer): "Виленской губернии /Gubernii Wilenskiej" [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)

Vasilii Petrovich Pyadyshev/ Пядышев for “Географический атлас Российской империи, Царства Польского.../Atlas géographique de l'Empire de Russie, du Royaume de Pologne..”

published in St. Petersburg by the “Military Topographical Depot of His Imperial Majesty's General Staff.” The atlas was begun in 1820, finished in 1827, and updated in 1829 (Fig.

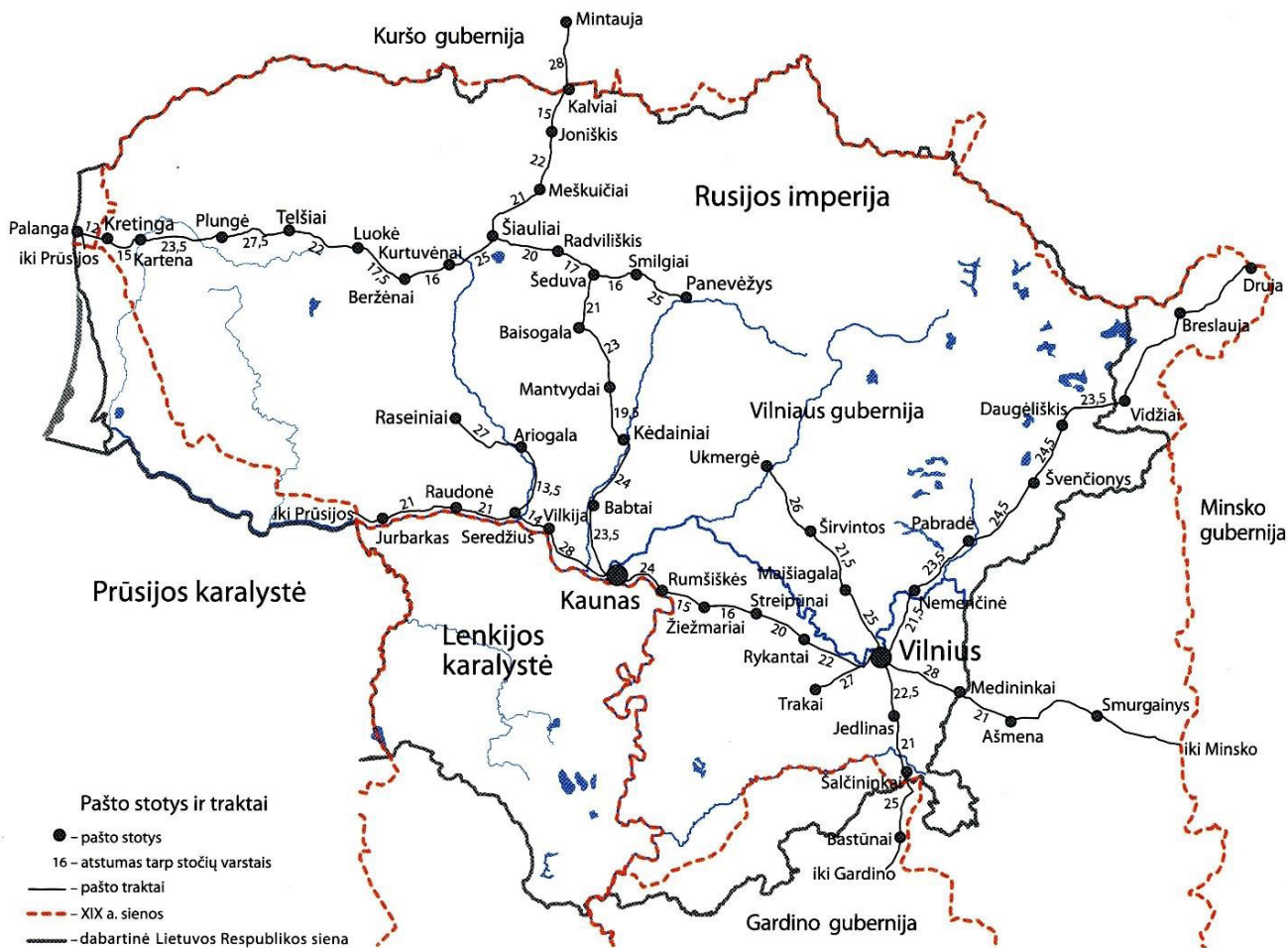


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Fig. 2: 1829 Pyadyshev/ Пядышев (cartographer): “Виленской губернии /Gubernii Wilenskiej” [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)

2). This article compares the existence and locations of post offices as depicted in the 1820 map with those depicted in its updated 1829 version, and with those depicted in the map of 19th century post office locations “Grafinis pašto traktu

žemėlapis,” created by Braižė G. Grizas, published in 2014 by Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus in “Paštas Lietuvoje iki 1918 metų: siuntos, antspaudai, žymos” by Vygingtas Bubnys and Julija Normantienė (Fig. 3).



Grafinis pašto traktų žemėlapis. Braižė G. Grižas

Fig. 3: 2014 Grižas (cartographer) [lnm.lt/](http://lnm.lt/)

The dotted-red-line gubernija boundaries on this map are correct for only part of the 19th century: “Kuršo gubernija” did not include Palanga until 1817; on September 9, 1801, Litva g., created December 12, 1796, was divided into the Litva-Vilna g. and the Litva-Grodno g. In 1843, an administrative reform – not depicted on this map – created the Kovno g. out of seven western districts of the Vilna g., including all Žemaitija. Vilna g. got three additional districts: Vileyka and Dzisna from Minsk g., and Lida from Grodno g. The addition of Dzisna gave Vilna g. the town of Druja, which had been

part of Minsk g. since 1796.

The 1820 and 1829 map legends show an image of a posthorn added to towns that have post offices. Posthorns were used, mostly in the 18th and 19th centuries, by postilions (those who rode the leading left-hand horse of a team or pair drawing a coach or carriage) to signal the arrival or departure of a post rider or mail coach (mail coaches began operating in Russia 1820<sup>1</sup>). Here are how the 1820 and 1829 map legends define the symbol (Figs. 4, 5).

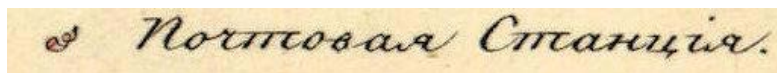


Fig. 4: 1820 Detail, Pyadyшев/ Пядышев, “Виленской губерній,” Postal Stations



Fig. 5: 1820 Detail, Pyadyшев/ Пядышев, “Виленской губерній,” Postal Stations

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_Post](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Post)

Each of the three maps show distances between post offices in *versts* (*верста/wiorst*), an obsolete Russian unit of length defined, in this era, as 500 *sazhen*, making a verst equal to 1.0668 kilometers/0.6629 miles/3,500 feet.

Using the post-offices-by-date lists in “*Paštas Lietuvoje iki 1918 metų: siuntos, antspaudai, žymos*” to establish a comparison “map” for 1801-12, I will now compare the locations of post offices as depicted on the three sources, by post roads:  
**#1: Palanga to Panevėžys a) Palanga to Telšiai**

For details about the Russian Postal system and its stations in the first half of the 19th century, I refer you John Randolph’s chapter: “Postal System of the Russian Empire, 1700–1850,” pages 155–183 in “*Information and Empire*” by Simon Franklin and Katherine Bowers, available online thanks to Open Book Publishers at: <https://books.openedition.org/obp/4750?lang=en>



Fig. 6: 1801-12



Fig. 7: 1820



Fig. 8: 1829

While the 1801-12 map and the 1820 map depict the same five towns as having post offices, the 1829 map, while showing the same distances between towns/post offices, has had posthorns erased for Kretinga, Kartena, and Plungė, indicating that they no longer had post offices. All five were “Lithuanian” in 1801-12: for hundreds of years prior to the 1795 Third Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Palanga had been part of the Duchy/Eldership of Samogitia

(*Žemaičių seniūnija*) within the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (*Lietuvos Didžioji Kunigaikštystė*). From 1795 to December 11, 1796, it was part of Vilna g., and from December 12, 1796, to 1817 it was part of Litva-Vilna g. In 1817 Palanga was assigned to Kuršo g. Palanga again became a “Lithuanian” – not a “Latvian” – city on March 30, 1921.

**#1: Palanga to Panevėžys b) Telšiai to Šiauliai**



Fig. 9: 1801-12



Fig. 10: 1820



Fig. 11: 1829

The same five towns are identified as having post offices on all three maps, but distances between them, as well as town names, have been updated in the 1829 map.

The 1801-12 and 1820 maps show the same five towns with post offices; the 1829 map shows updated distances between them, as well as showing that Smilgiai has lost its post offices.

#1: Palanga to Panevėžys c) Šiauliai to Panevėžys



Fig. 12: 1801-12



Fig. 13: 1820



Fig. 14: 1829

#2 Mintauja/Mitau (today's Jelgava, Latvia) to Kaunas a) Mitau to Šiauliai



Fig. 15: 1801-12



Fig. 16: 1820



Fig. 17: 1829

All five towns are depicted as having post offices, with distances between them changing in the 1820 and 1829 maps. Note that the “Polish” and “Russian” labels for Mintauja in the 1820 map changed to the Germanic “Mitau” (today’s Jelgava) in the 1829 map.

#2 Mintauja/Mitau to Kaunas b) Šiauliai to Kaunas

All eight towns are depicted as having post offices. The 1829 map has changed distances between them.

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Fig. 18: 1801-12

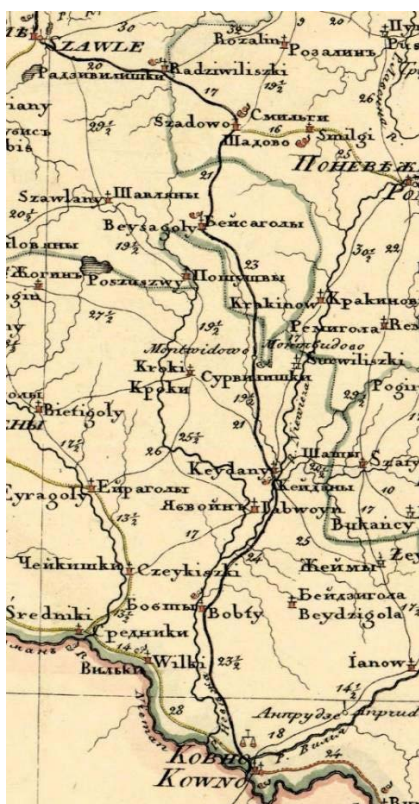


Fig. 19: 1820

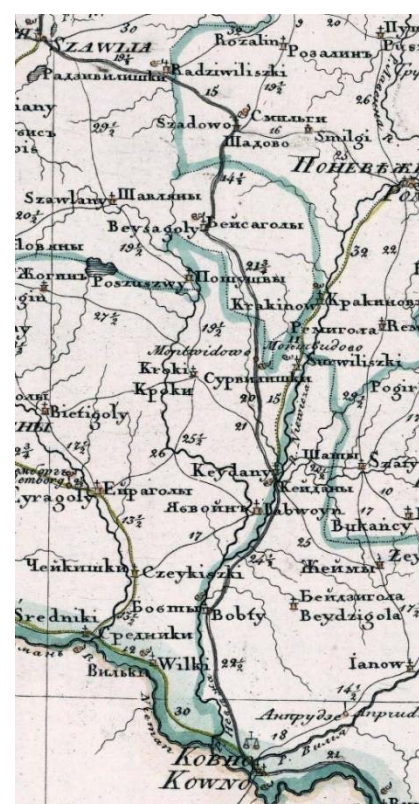


Fig. 20: 1829

#3 Kaunas to Smurgainys (and on to Minskas) a) Kaunas to Vilnius



Fig. 21: 1801-12

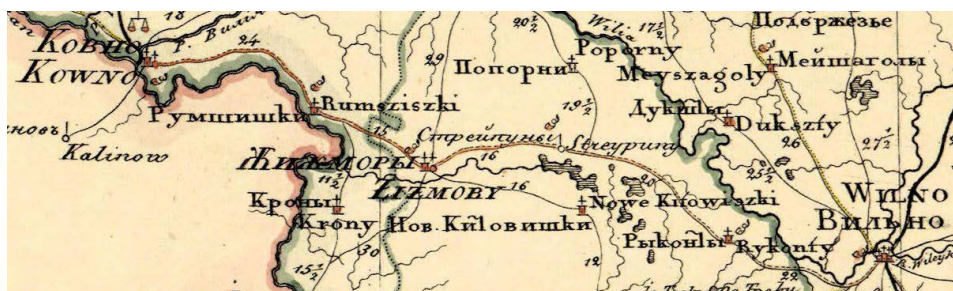


Fig. 22: 1820



Fig. 23: 1829

While all six towns have post offices on all three maps, three out of five distances between them have changed on the 1829 map.

#3 Kaunas to Smurgainys (and on to Minskas) b) Vilnius to Smurgainys



Fig. 24: 1801-12



Fig. 25: 1820

Vilnius and Medininkai are the only post offices in 1801 lists; by 1812, Ašmena had a post office. Smurgainys does not appear on either the 1801 or 1812 lists.

As a result of an apparent effort after 1812 (and Napoleon's invasion of Moscow) to upgrade the Vilnius to Minsk postal route, there are now six post offices between Vilnius and the border with Minsk guberniya (created in 1793 from Grand Duchy of Lithuania lands, and which lasted until 1921). A new

post office is depicted at today's Rukainiai, on the map as Rukonie/Рукони, halfway between Vilnius and Medininkai, which is on today's border with Belarus. Halfway between Ašmena (Oszmianu/Ошмяны) and Smurgainys (Smorgonie/Сморгонь), both in today's Belarus, there is a new post office at Narbutowszczyzna/ Нарбутовщина, today's Narbuty. The map also depicts a post office just over the border with Minsk g.: Prudy/Пруды.



Fig. 25: 1820

The only changes from 1820 are some distances between post offices, and the change from Smorgonie/Сморгонь to Smorgoni/Сморгонь.

**#4 Vilnius to Bastūnai** (and south to Lida in Litva-Grodno guberniya)

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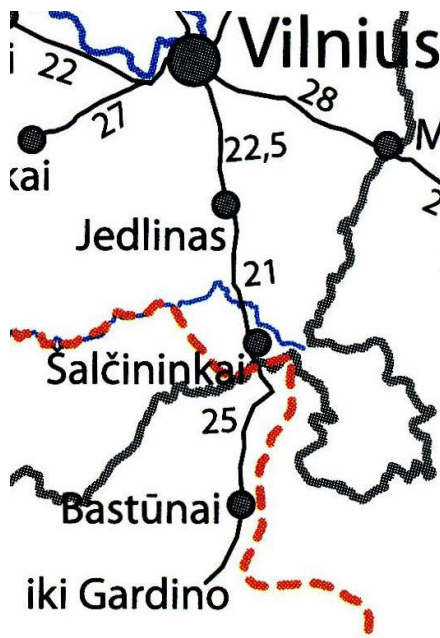


Fig. 27: 1801-12

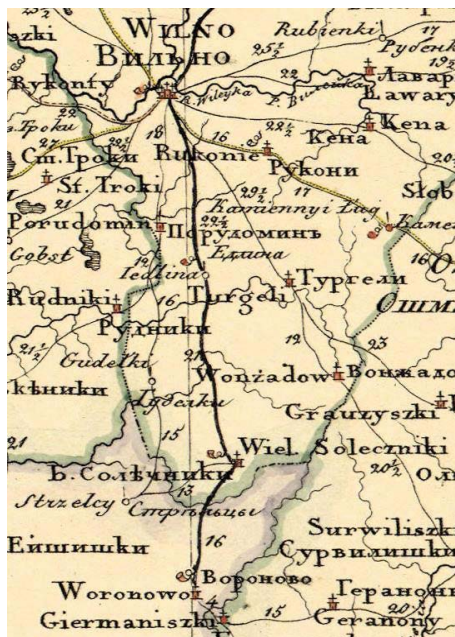


Fig. 28: 1820

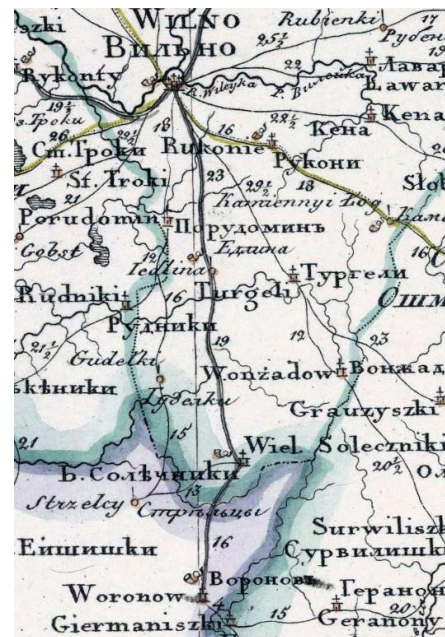


Fig. 29: 1829

1801-12: "Bastūnai," supposedly 25 versts south of Šalčininkai – and in Gardino g. according to the map and list of 1812 post offices – did not appear on 1801 lists. Both the 1820

and 1829 maps show a post office only 16 versts south of Šalčininkai: Woronowo/Вороново, today's Воранава/Voranava in Belarus, that does not appear on the 1801-12 lists and map.

But where is Bastūnai? Details of 1820 and 1829 maps of Litva-Grodno g, Šalčininkai to Lida:



Fig. 30: 1820



Fig. 31: 1829

The detail images of these Russian-produced maps differ in only two respects: a half-verst between B. Soleczniki/Б. Солечники and Woronowo/Вороново, and a half-verst change in distance and spelling of the next southward post office, from Zirmony/Жирмоны to Zirmony/Жирмуны. The distance between B. Soleczniki and Zirmony is 31 versts (32 on the 1829 map), whereas the distance between Šalčininkai and

Bastūnai on the 1801-12 map is 25 versts. Bastūnai, if it existed, should have been between Woronow and Zirmony.

Let us look at maps of the area by Schlieben in 1829 and by Vandermaelen in 1857 – with posthorns identifying post offices – from his "Carte de l'Allemagne:"

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Fig. 32: 1829 [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)  
Schlieben: "Atlas von Europa"

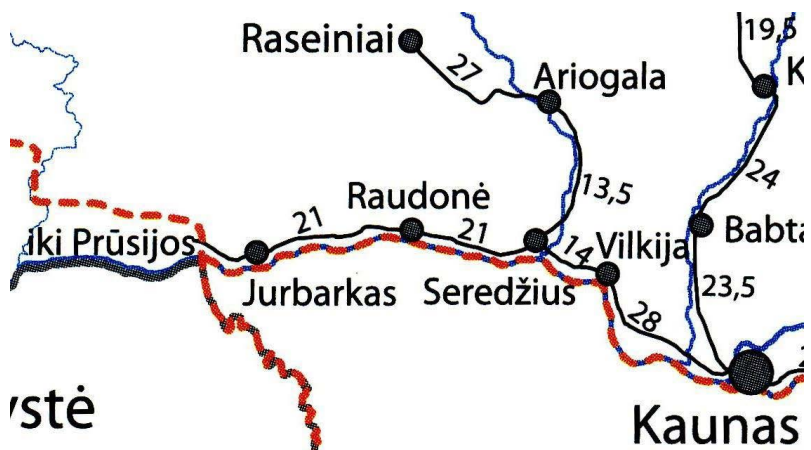


Fig. 33: 1857 [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)  
Vandermaelen: "Allemagne #8"

Both the 1829 and 1857 maps, unlike the Russian-made 1820 and 1829 maps, show a location on the road to Lida, just south of the Litva-Vilna g. border on the 1829 map, and just south of the Vilna g. border on the 1857 map, that appears to be where Bastūnai is depicted on the 1801-12 map: “Benjakony” on the German map, “Beniakoui” on the

Belgian one. Those cartographers possibly used German information as a source.

#5 a) Kaunas to Raseiniai; b) Kaunas to Jurbarkas (and west to Prussia)



All post offices, Kaunas to Jurbarkas, and Kaunas to Raseiniai, were on 1801-12 lists.

Fig. 34: 1801-12



All post offices appeared on the 1820 map, with the same distances from each other.

Fig. 35: 1820



Apart from some differences in distances between post offices on the 1820 map, there is a new postal station at Plemborg, today's Daugirdai (named after the Daugirdas family manor), just 2½ versts up the road from Eyragoly/Ariogala. Why was it established? Perhaps due to the influence of the builder of the road between Kaunas and Raseiniai, engineer and *tijūnas* Stanislovas Daugirdas, who owned land at that spot? His son Mykolas, also an engineer and road/railway builder for the Russian Military, built a manor house – Plemborg Manor – there in 1848. Mykolas was the father of the Lithuanian artist and archaeologist Tadas Daugirdas

Fig. 36: 1829

#6 Vilnius to Ukmergė

All three postal offices northwest of Vilnius appear on 1801-12 lists.



Fig. 37: 1801-12

The same post offices are on the 1820 map, with minor corrections on distances between them. *Wilkomirz*/*Вилькомиръ* became Ukmergė, in 1919.

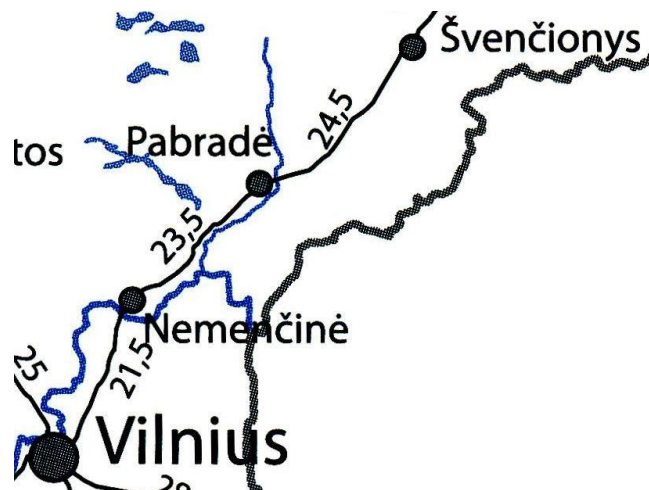


Fig. 38: 1820

All the same post offices, with further corrections of distances between them.



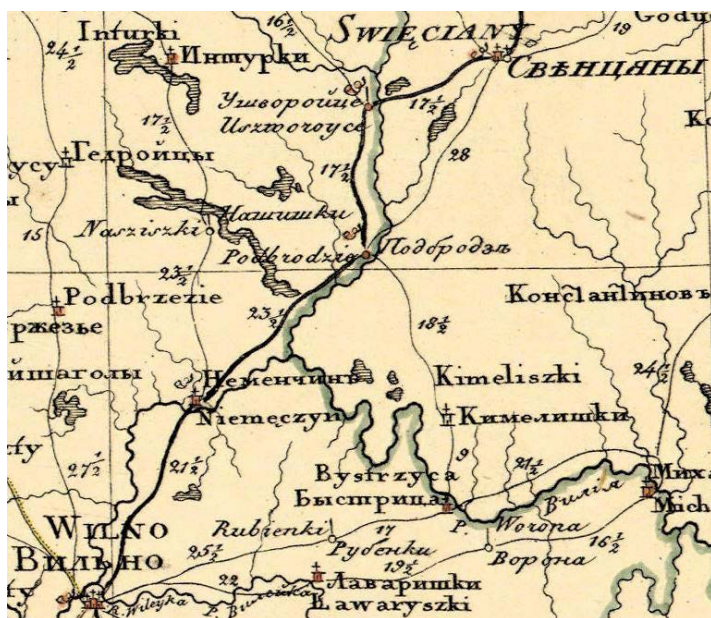
Fig. 39: 1829



#7 Vilnius to Druja a) Vilnius to Švenčionys

Post office Pabradė appears on 1812 lists, but not on those of 1801.

Fig. 40: 1801-12



The postal route has changed after Pabradė: instead of taking a direct 28 verst (*recalculated from the 1801-12 map's 24.5 verst*) path to Švenčionys, the route is now two legs of 17 1/2 versts each, first heading due north to a new post office: *Usworoyce* – today's Ašvaraistis, then northeast to Švenčionys.

Fig. 41: 1820



The 1829 version of this map shows changed distances between all post offices, Vilnius to Švenčionys. In 1831, *Usworoyce*/Ašvaraistis post office kept 34 horses and was served by 12 carriages and six couriers.<sup>1</sup>

Fig. 42: 1829

<sup>1</sup> <http://pabradedomus.lt/bendruomenesnaujienos/renginiai/2017/09/senuoju-pasto-keliu-2017-m>

#7 Vilnius to Druja b) Švenčionys to Druja

Post office at Vidžiai, Breslauja, and Druja do not appear on 1801 lists. Vidžiai is on 1812 lists, but Breslauja and Druja are not. Druja – today’s *Druya/Друя* in Belarus – was part of Minsk g. from 1796 to 1843, when Vilna g. was enlarged with three districts: Vilyeka and Dzisna (Druja had been in Dzisna) from Minsk g., and Lida district from Grodno g.



Fig. 43: 1801-12

A post office at Apsas (*Opsa/Опса* on the map and in today’s Belarus – appears for the first time 19 versts northeast of Vidžiai (*Widzy/Відзы*) in today’s Belarus. Also appearing on this map is a post office for Breslauja (*Braslaw/Браслав*) – today’s Браслаў in Belarus, as well as a post office 24½ versts northeast: Czerniawa, which is the site, I believe, of today’s *Slobodka/Слабодка*, Belarus. Druja is, correctly, absent, not being in Litva-Vilna g., but the map shows a postal station, *Przydruysk/Придруйскъ* (today’s Druysk in Belarus) in Minsko g., just over the border of Litva-Vilna g. in 1820, 20 versts northeast of Czerniawa (*Slobodka/Слабодка*).



Fig. 44: 1820

The 1829 map shows that three post offices have closed since 1820: the posthorns for Apsas, Breslauja, and Czerniawa have been erased, apparently part of a down-grading of the Vidžiai to Druja route – a route taken by part of Napoleon’s army. Meanwhile, a new post road is depicted going due north from Vidžiai ultimately to Daugpilis/Daugavpils, in Kuršo g., today’s Latvia. New post offices along the way have opened at *Dryswiaty/Дрисвяты* in today’s Belarus, and at *Brigen*, which is, I believe, a manor house of the von der Brügggen family.

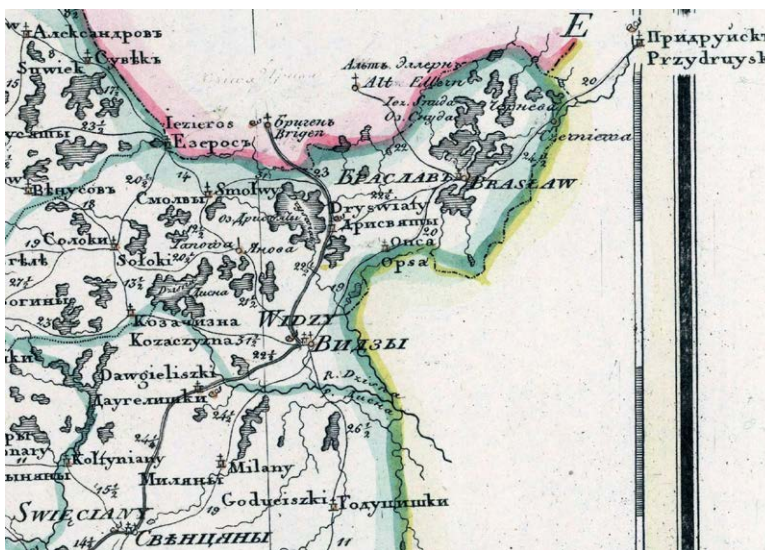


Fig. 45: 1829

**To summarize:** maps of the area created/published during that time can confirm published information that particular post offices were active, not yet opened, or shut down, as well as approximately when some major postal routes were established or down-graded.

For further information on Napoleon in Lithuania, and on mail sent from there by the “Grande Armée,” see articles by Dr. Vytautas Doniela in LPS # 236, 2007: “Napoleon and Lithuania, 1807 and 1812,” and # 248, 2020: “Lithuania ‘restored’ by Napoleon in 1812.”

Not considered in this article is the impact to post offices of Napoleon’s march to, and retreat from, Moscow, even though, as shown in Fig. 46, the postal routes from Jurbarkas to Kaunas, from Kaunas to Vilnius, and from Vilnius to Druja, and on to Moscow, were taken advantage of by his armies.

Depending on reader interest, sequels to this article, comparing depictions of post offices on maps after 1829 to World War I can follow.